JOHN O'NEIL, JR. AND AGNES O'NEIL




Agnes O'Neil, known and beloved by hundreds as "Nannie O'Neil," was one of the colorful characters of Midway.

She was born in County Down, Ireland, January 20, 1828, a daughter of Thomas and Rachel Ellis Hair. Her parents had eight children, seven girls and one boy. Her brother, Samuel Hair, was well known in Midway in later years.

When Nannie was nine months old her family moved to Scotland, where she spent her young womanhood. In her early years she was employed in the home of a wealthy family.

When Nannie was 17 years old, all of her family had joined the LDS Church but herself. She felt ashamed for her family, and worried over their membership in the Church. Her unhappiness continued for some time until one night she had a dream. She dreamed she was standing on the banks of the River Clyde and a great book opened up before her. A voice spoke to her, bidding her to open to the chapter and verse where it admonished her to "search the scriptures."

The next day she searched the Bible for the reference, and after reading it, went humbly to her mother and said she wished to join the Church. She was baptized by Elder John Smith. The winter was so cold that ice had to be broken for her baptism. Throughout her life she remained a staunch member of the Church.

Shortly after her baptism she was married to John O'Neil at Del Ry, Scotland. Mr. O'Neil was already a good Latter-day Saint.

In May of 1863 they left Scotland to come to America. They had five children at the time, four boys and one girl. They had already buried three sons in Scotland.

They arrived in Utah in October of 1863 and came directly to Midway through the influence of George and James T. Wilson, who were cousins of Nannie.

After settling in Utah the O'Neils had three more children. When the youngest was eight, Nannie was left a widow, and had a hard struggle to keep her family together. After almost eight years as a widow she opened a hotel and became famous throughout the country as a genial hostess and expert cook. She was also an expert seamstress and skilled in embroidery.

She worked faithfully in the Church all her life. She was president of the Primary and a teacher in Relief Society and Sunday School for many years.

Her personality was a powerful force, and she was able to draw people into the closeness of her friendship. As she operated the hotel people gathered in throngs for her parties and celebrations. Her birthday became an occasion of great celebration, and was one of the outstanding celebrations in the valley.

Fine dinners were prepared, gifts were sent, poems were written and programs presented.

Throughout her life Nannie O'Neil was a woman of great popularity and was an influence for good in the community.

Poem Written by William Lindsay

'Tis many a year since first we met
To visit Nannie O'Neal
To celebrate her natal day
And wish her kind heart "weel"
We met a hearty welcome
In her cheerful, kindly way
And many a happy time we've had
With her the livelong day
Many of those who used to come
Have passed away and gone.
Their bodies sleeping in their graves
'Til the resurrection morn
Aunt Nannie, too, was called away
When nearly eighty-seven
And everyone of us feels sure
That she is now in Heaven
Because she kept the laws of God
As nearly as she could
And trusted everyone she met
As all true Christians should.
Those of her friends who yet remain
Still hold the memory dear
And gladly meet to celebrate
Her Birthday every year.

She died on July 16, 1914 at the age of 87.

Children of John and Agnes "Nannie" O'Neil were:

James, an early pioneer of Ashley Valley
William, who served as a state legislator
John, who died soon after the family came from Scotland
Rachel, who married Louis Coleman
Samuel, respected citizen of Midway
Helen
George
Agnes.

— 668

